

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For

Deerwood Ranch Wild Horse Ecosanctuary
EA Number: DOI-BLM-030-2012-0125-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-WY-030-2012-0125-EA), I have determined that the Proposed Action will impose no significant impacts on the human environment. No significant impacts were disclosed during completion of the environmental analysis for this EA; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. The proposed action, will not create any additional effects other than those disclosed in this document, which will have sufficient context and intensity, as defined in section 7.3 of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (Manual H-1790-1; Page 70), to be considered significant.

Context:

The project is a site-specific action and contains analysis of environmental impacts that will result from the construction of a temporary high tensile electric fence to aid in monitoring and for the safety of the wild horses the first year of operation, while providing, humane long-term care for 300 excess wild horses from Wyoming's Herd Management Areas. The wild horses will be cared for in a natural setting that allows for free-roaming behavior, conserves the environment and health of the lands and broadens public education opportunities. The proposed action will place wild horses on private ranch lands that have been historically used to pasture cattle and change grazing use from cattle to wild horses.

Intensity:

The considerations listed in 40 CFR 1509.27(b) (1-10) were used to evaluate the intensity of the environmental effects described in the EA:

- 1. There would not be an offset of potential significant adverse effects as a result of beneficial effects by approving the proposed action.*

The beneficial effect of entering into a Cooperative Agreement (CA) for the care and maintenance of excess wild horses on non-federal ranchlands fulfills the BLM direction from Congress through the 2010 Appropriations Act to (1) consider private proposals for long-term care of wild horses and burros; (2) create a bidding process among such proposals, and (3) prepare and publish a new comprehensive long-term plan and policy for management of wild horses and burros that involves consideration and development of proposals by non-governmental entities.

- 2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide, humane long-term care for excess wild horses from Wyoming's Herd Management Area's, in a natural setting that allows for free-roaming behavior, conserves the environment and health of the lands and broadens public education opportunities. The intent of the ecosanctuary concept is to add economic incentives to the long-term pasture contracts that

ensure a cost-effective program that will offset the typical costs to tax payers of long-term care of wild horses.

The safety and welfare of wild horses was carefully considered when the specifications for the working pastures and the requirements for feeding and care were developed for the Ecosanctuary Request for Application (RFA).

3. There would be no effect to unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no prime farmlands or wild and scenic rivers in the project area. As described in the EA, no direct or indirect impacts on the Wyoming-Colorado Railroad, the Centennial Ridge Mining District and associated properties were identified. Monitoring and environmental consultations included in the Proposed Action will be implemented during any fence construction to minimize the potential for adverse impacts to heritage resources. In particular, Wyoming State Land Board and the Wyoming Game and Fish Laramie Regional Office will be consulted on any ranch infrastructure improvements.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Public input regarding the Proposed Action was solicited during scoping; comments received from scoping were incorporated into the EA. Comments received generally referred to fencing, duration of the project and animal health/veterinary services. Each was addressed in the EA as being a factor of Request For Application (RFA) qualification. Interdisciplinary Team members and Representatives of Wyoming Game and Fish Laramie Regional Office, United States Forest Service Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest Laramie Ranger District met on the ground along with managers of Deerwood Ranch at the initiation of the proposed action. Property infrastructure and pasture management was discussed. A consensus was reached regarding fence construction and containment of the wild horses in relationship to Deerwood Ranch private property and the Medicine-Bow Routt National Forest property.

The EA was released for a 30-day public review and comment period, which ended on August 24, 2012, during which six different parties submitted written comments. Three of the submitted comments were from state agency partners and three from the general public.

Comments received generally referred to fencing, monitoring and benefit to the public. Many were about the Wild Horse and Burro program and outside of the scope of this particular EA. Consultation with state agency partners on fencing and monitoring, will be on-going and a necessary component of the management plan that will be developed as part of a sustainable wild horse ecosanctuary.

5. There would be no establishment of precedence for future actions with significant impacts by approving the Proposed Action.

The preferred alternative neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

6. To the BLM's knowledge there are no other actions related to the Proposed Action with cumulatively significant impacts in the Proposed Project Area.

No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the preferred alternative

7. There would be no effect to habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, or proposed species as a result of implementing the proposed project within the principle treatment area. Timing restrictions would minimize or prevent adverse effects to other wildlife species and their habitat.

No individually or cumulatively significant impacts were identified for the preferred alternative of placing 300 excess wild horses on privately owned lands of Deerwood Ranch in Centennial, Wyoming. Any adverse impacts identified for the preferred alternative, in conjunction with any adverse impacts of other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions will result in negligible to moderate impacts to natural and cultural resources.

8. Approving the Proposed Action would not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or regulations imposed for the protection of the environment.

An intensive archeological inventory to identify districts, sites, or other properties eligible for listing to or included on the National Register of Historic Places was completed for this preferred alternative. The investigations satisfied the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for the identification of historic properties. During this inventory, one historic isolate was identified. The Wyoming-Colorado Railroad is an eligible property for the National Register of Historic Places. However, this historic property is not within the area of potential direct effects. A view-shed analysis was conducted to determine potential impacts and resulted in a determination of no adverse effect to the cultural property. Monitoring of construction activities by qualified archeologists provided by the BLM during fence construction will minimize the potential for adverse effects to heritage resources.

9. Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:

There would be no effect to habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, proposed species as a result of implementing the proposed action as described in the EA for Deerwood Ranch Wild Horse Ecosanctuary.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law:
The preferred alternative violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Authorized Official


Rawlins Field Manager

Date

8/28/12